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• (1105)

[English]

The Chair (Chris Bittle (St. Catharines, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 31 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

Pursuant to Standing Order 81(4), the committee is meeting on its study of the main estimates, 2026-27.

Today's meeting is taking place in public in a hybrid format, pursuant to the Standing Orders. Members are attending in person in the room and remotely using the Zoom application.

Before I continue, I would ask all in-person participants—and I hope all of you are familiar with this—to consult the card on your table. These measures are in place to help prevent audio and feedback incidents and to protect the health and safety of all participants. For those who are struggling to find their card, don't worry, just speak into the microphone and don't put your earpiece.... I shouldn't joke about that.

I have a few comments for the benefit of the members.

All comments should be addressed through the chair, so Mr. Speaker, if you say “you”, you're referring to me. That was a Speaker joke.

For members in the room, raise your hand if you wish to speak.

Madame Normandin, if you wish to speak, use the “raise hand” feature.

I would now like to welcome our witnesses for today, and there have been some additions, so give me a moment, please.

We have with us the Honourable Francis Scarpaleggia, Speaker of the House of Commons. From the House of Commons, we have Eric Janse, Clerk of the House of Commons; Jeffrey LeBlanc, deputy clerk, procedure; Michel Bédard, law clerk and parliamentary counsel; Stéphan Aubé, chief executive administrator; Paul St George, chief financial officer; Rebekah Kletke, chief operations officer; Benoit Dicaire, chief information officer; Jennifer Ruff, chief audit executive; and Carolyne Evangelidis, human resources officer. Name tags will be delivered shortly.

Even though we would prefer Madame Normandin to be here in person, we have a lot of witnesses, and some of them are taking up her spot, but I'm sure she doesn't mind.

We'll now turn to the Speaker for his opening remarks.

[Translation]

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia (Speaker of the House of Commons): Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Members of the committee, I am delighted to be here today.

As Speaker of the House of Commons, it is my responsibility to present the 2026–27 main estimates for the House of Commons and those for the Parliamentary Protective Service.

The main estimates presented today outline the funding that enables our institutions to support the important work carried out by members of Parliament, on Parliament Hill and elsewhere, as part of their diverse duties.

[English]

The 2026-27 main estimates for the House of Commons amount to \$669 million, an increase of 1.9% from the previous year. This moderate increase reflects the impact of cost pressures, which are partially offset by budget adjustments tied to the results of the last election and by efficiencies identified through the strategic internal assessment of operations, or SIAO, as it's called. The SIAO is a multi-year review of House administration services that aims to strengthen service excellence while controlling costs.

The handout you have received presents the year-over-year changes in the budget across four categories. Number one is a funding increase as part of the long-term vision and plan and new funding for the public visitor registration program. Two is cost-of-living and 2025 general election funding impacts. Three is other items. Four is the strategic internal assessment of operations.

[Translation]

The first category includes an increase of \$1.1 million. This includes funding for the new off-site data centre on the Hill for disaster recovery, i.e., for the maintenance and life cycle of this facility. This category also includes new permanent funding to expand the team responsible for visitor registration at the Visitor Welcome Centre.

[English]

The second category, cost-of-living and 2025 general election funding impacts, represents an increase of \$10.6 million. This includes a 2.8% increase, or \$5.9 million, to the members' and House officers' office budgets, the constituency office budget and the travel status expenses budget, based on the adjusted consumer price index, or CPI.

The adjustment to the office budgets of members and House officers also accounts for a net reduction of \$2.7 million to reflect the impacts of the general election. This includes a \$4-million reduction to the House officers' budgets following the shift from four recognized parties to three and an increase of \$1.2 million to the elector supplement for members representing densely populated constituencies.

• (1110)

[Translation]

This category also includes the annual salary adjustment for members of Parliament provided for in the Parliament of Canada Act. At approximately 3.3%, it took effect on April 1, 2025, and amounts to \$2.3 million.

Finally, it includes \$5.2 million for salary increases for House Administration staff and pages.

For the 2026–27 fiscal year, the Parliamentary Protective Service, or PPS, is not requesting additional appropriations under the main estimates. The PPS can bill for services, and we intend to use this additional revenue to offset expenses. However, the PPS is considering making some adjustments to the employee benefits plan.

[English]

For the 2026–27 fiscal year, the amount for the statutory employee benefit plan increased by \$1.3 million, for a total budget of \$120.9 million.

The three other adjustments to the PPS employee benefit plan are as follows.

First, funds will be transferred from operating and maintenance to increased overtime expenses. This change better aligns budgets with expenses and increases the employee benefit plan by \$179,802.

Second, there is an increase in revenues for services offered, from \$1.5 million to \$2 million. The monetary impact of this change is an increase of \$164,000 to the employee benefit plan.

[Translation]

Thirdly, this is an increase for the employee benefits plan, as required by the Treasury Board Secretariat. This increase, from 15.3% to 16.4%, amounts to \$969,687.

Overall, these adjustments have no impact on the PPS's appropriations, which would remain at \$106 million. It is the PPS's intention not to seek additional funding, while maintaining a level of security service essential to the entire parliamentary community.

Mr. Speaker, this concludes the overview of the 2026–27 main estimates for the House of Commons and the Parliamentary Protective Service. We would be happy to answer your questions.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you so much.

Just to let the Speaker know, we typically give witnesses five minutes to speak. No one rose on a point of order, so just keep that in mind, should anyone in this room have an S.O. 31 coming up.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: Provisions have already been made for that.

The Chair: That's excellent news.

We'll now turn to Mr. Cooper for six minutes, please.

Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Sturgeon River, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'll address my questions to the table, so whoever wishes to answer is fine.

MPs are explicitly forbidden from benefiting from expenses that they charge to the House of Commons. Is that correct?

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: Yes.

Michael Cooper: That is precisely what MP Lori Idlout did when she expensed the House of Commons for gifts she purchased from a company of which she is the sole proprietor—Carvings Nunavut. She did so not once, not twice but on four separate occasions, with a total value of purchases of \$1,756, which she charged to taxpayers.

Ms. Idlout says that she has since repaid the money. On what date was the money repaid?

• (1115)

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: I don't have that date specifically.

Eric Janse (Clerk of the House of Commons): In my recollection, it was several days after.

Paul, do you know?

Paul St George (Chief Financial Officer, House of Commons): I don't have the specific date with me.

Eric Janse: We'll look as we continue with the questions, and we'll come back to that.

Michael Cooper: My colleague Mr. Barrett wrote to the Speaker, as chair of the Board of Internal Economy, on March 14, 2026, to raise these inappropriate charges. Was the repayment after that letter?

Eric Janse: Yes.

Michael Cooper: She repaid the money only after she got caught, effectively, pocketing the money.

Whose name was on the repayment tendered? Was it Ms. Idlout, or was it some other person or entity?

Eric Janse: I don't have that at hand. We'll have to find it and get back to you.

Michael Cooper: If you could, undertake to do so.

When a member submits an office expense claim over \$1,000 to the House of Commons, the member must personally approve the claim. Is that correct?

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: That's my understanding. That's what I do.

Michael Cooper: That is correct.

On August 27, 2025, Ms. Idlout made a \$1,380 purchase from her own company, which was then submitted to the House of Commons for reimbursement. To confirm, Ms. Idlout would have had to approve that \$1,380 claim. Is that correct?

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: It would be logical to assume that, yes.

Michael Cooper: Additionally, Ms. Idlout made two other purchases, one of \$150 from her own company in January 2025 and a \$76 purchase from her own company on June 25, 2025, which were charged to her office budget. Were these gifts charged by Ms. Idlout personally or by a member of her staff acting with her delegated authority?

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: I wouldn't have those details.

Eric Janse: Again, we'll have to look into it and get back to the committee.

Michael Cooper: If you could, undertake to do so.

Ms. Idlout purchased these gifts just weeks before and weeks after last year's general election, which she won by only 41 votes. House policies provide that no single gift can cost more than \$150. That means she had to have sold herself at least 12 separate gifts from her business to hand out. Do you have any information on who she gave these gifts to?

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: I don't personally have any information.

Michael Cooper: Is that something the Board of Internal Economy is looking into?

Eric Janse: It was raised at the last board meeting, and it will be coming back to the next board meeting.

Michael Cooper: Okay.

As I understand it, Mr. Barrett has asked for the Board of Internal Economy to address the situation. What powers does the board have? What remedies can the board impose?

Eric Janse: I'll pass that one off to our law clerk, Michel Bédard.

Michel Bédard (Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel, House of Commons): The Board of Internal Economy is in charge of financial administrative affairs for the House of Commons and its members. It doesn't have the power to impose fines or to impose punishments, but it can take measures within its traditions. The board can always refer matters to another authority if it feels that the matter needs to be addressed.

In similar cases in the past, when there have been reimbursements of expenses that have been asked for by the board, usually the reimbursements sufficed and the board did not take any further measures.

Michael Cooper: On that last point, has the board ever asked for a member to make a repayment exceeding the fair market value of resources inappropriately used?

Michel Bédard: When the administration briefed BOIE on the appropriate measures that would be sufficient to address an expenditure that was not consistent with the bylaw, the reimbursement was based on an assessment that was made, pursuant to fair market value.

Michael Cooper: I would observe in closing that Ms. Idlout claims these charges were made in error. That assertion simply doesn't add up, given the fact that there was a \$1,380 claim that she would have had to personally approve. She may have also personally approved the three other purchases.

She knew exactly what she was doing. She signed off on the claim. She billed taxpayers and thought she could get away with it. It was only after she got caught that she turned around and paid the money back. Her assertion bears no credibility.

• (1120)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Cooper.

We'll now turn to Madame Brière.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Brière, you have the floor for six minutes.

Hon. Élisabeth Brière (Sherbrooke, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good morning, gentlemen. Thank you for being here this morning and for all the work you do at every level, both to ensure our safety and to keep the House running smoothly.

Mr. Speaker, how do this year's budget priorities reflect the evolving risks facing Parliament, particularly with regard to security and hybrid threats?

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: I think this is a question for Mr. Monette or Mr. Dicaire, because it concerns IT.

Mitch Monette (Director, Parliamentary Protective Service): I would say that this is part of the responsibilities of the Office of the Sergeant-at-Arms and Institutional Security, as well as ours at the Parliamentary Protective Service.

I can discuss the security environment and then the efforts being made in general, given that we are testifying in a public hearing today.

It is clear that in our budget, particularly the most recent one, there has been an increase in funding for programs that specifically contribute to the safety of each member of Parliament on the Hill itself. We have added programs to ensure that our parliamentarians feel safe when arriving in the Parliament Hill area. We have created a program called Walk Safe, which is an escort program, to ensure that every parliamentarian approaching Parliament Hill feels completely safe.

We have also significantly increased our staffing for member training. I am pleased to announce that we recently received the keys to our new PPS training centre, for which we held a grand opening recently. This will increase our capacity to effectively train our staff and create scenarios that will allow our members to familiarize themselves with our duties.

We have also been developing an extremely robust exercise program over the past few years, in which we conduct exercises that simulate situations we might face on Parliament Hill. We are working with our partners both inside and outside the Parliament to create interoperability that will allow us to support one another in the event of an incident on the Hill.

I will now turn the floor over to Mr. Dicaire so he can tell you about what the Office of the Sergeant-at-Arms can do.

Benoit Dicaire (Chief Information Officer, House of Commons): Thank you, Mr. Monette.

I will discuss cybersecurity issues.

We are also working closely with the Office of the Sergeant-at-Arms on foreign interference, as well as in partnership with national security representatives.

Cybersecurity remains a key priority for the House of Commons. Parliament remains a prime target for highly sophisticated actors. Therefore, the investments you see in what we presented a few years ago make a significant contribution to maintaining the infrastructure necessary for the secure conduct of debates in the House of Commons, as well as to the continuity of the institution's operations, regardless of the sources of risk. Thus, these investments aim to protect Parliament and ensure the continuity of parliamentary activities.

• (1125)

Hon. Élisabeth Brière: Thank you very much for that answer.

We are facing budget constraints. The Speaker of the House told us that you are not requesting additional funds. So how will you be able to adequately ensure security and protection on Parliament Hill without resorting to additional funds?

Mitch Monette: We have a fairly substantial budget that allows us to meet all our safety objectives. We have put certain programs on hold, so to speak, since we want to expand all our existing programs before considering new ones. We are satisfied with our current budget, which allows us to achieve all these objectives.

As I told you, we continue to improve our training program, as well as our exercise program. We recently added K-9 units. I don't know if you've noticed recently, but this was a cost-free addition, since we're working in collaboration with the RCMP. So, a few times a week, you can see K-9 units at the vehicle checkpoint.

Eric Janse: I would just like to add that, on the House of Commons side, as the Speaker mentioned in his opening remarks, we submitted a request to the Board of Internal Economy in March to secure significantly more resources for security—not only here in Ottawa on Parliament Hill, but also at constituency offices and members' residences—as well as for cybersecurity. That has helped us a great deal.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you so much.

I have just one point. The mics are very sensitive, so witnesses, if you're shuffling papers or talking with your hands, just be careful not to hit the mic. It can be very loud in our interpreters' ears.

We'll now go to Madame Normandin for five minutes.

[Translation]

Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

My first question concerns cybersecurity. It is therefore perhaps directed to Mr. Dicaire.

I understand that there are likely measures in place by Parliament to protect members' data within the systems managed by Parliament. However, about ten days ago, Canada Life, the insurers for members of Parliament, was the victim of a ransomware attack.

So, I would like to hear your thoughts on how the House is able to manage the security of members of Parliament's data, particularly when that data may be hosted by external parties.

Benoit Dicaire: That is an excellent question, Ms. Normandin.

We work closely with our national security partners, especially when it comes to data hosted outside the parliamentary precinct.

As for this particular incident, it affected a service procured by the Government of Canada through Treasury Board. Consequently, my colleague Ms. Evangelidis, the chief human resources officer, and I—since this is a human resources management service—are working closely with Treasury Board to understand the full extent of the impact this incident could have on members of Parliament and to take the necessary steps to respond, if needed.

That said, proactivity remains a key pillar of our cybersecurity strategy. So, we must learn from this type of attack, which occurred outside the parliamentary precinct, and we must also inform members of Parliament. We are working on an information campaign to help members better manage the repercussions of this type of incident, over which they have little control.

Christine Normandin: Thank you. I'll continue along the same lines.

I imagine that this type of attack is part of what will help us, through the lessons learned, determine the preventive measures that Parliament will take in the future. However, when deciding to choose an external service provider, do we conduct an analysis beforehand of its ability to withstand this type of attack, or an assessment of its cybersecurity level?

• (1130)

Benoit Dicaire: Once again, that is an excellent question, Ms. Normandin.

I can assure you that there are requirements in place, especially for House contracts. I will speak about contracts for which the House is the actual contracting authority. We have very specific requirements regarding security posture and data management. In this case, for our colleagues in the Government of Canada and the Treasury Board, these same requirements apply in the context of these contracts, where we are dealing with a large amount of data—sometimes highly sensitive—that could be provided. So, the same requirements are found in the contracts of our colleagues in the Government of Canada.

Christine Normandin: Mr. Dicaire, in his opening remarks, the Speaker spoke of remote data centres intended to ensure a form of redundancy, security, and data protection to prevent data loss.

Regarding data storage, is some or all of the data hosted within Canada rather than abroad? If not, is this something that is being considered?

Could the cost of hosting data within Canada—particularly to protect it from the U.S. CLOUD Act—represent an obstacle to hosting within Canada?

Benoit Dicaire: To answer your question, I'll just provide a little context.

Operational resilience in Parliament is very important. As you know, the work currently under way on Parliament Hill represents the largest construction site in Canada at this time. It was therefore not ideal to host data on the site of such a construction project, as this entailed additional risks. Parliament's strategy has been to build in a degree of resilience so that we can maintain certain data.

Most parliamentary data is public, and we advocate for it to be hosted in Canada. That is the requirement. Unfortunately, this is not always the case, for several reasons that I will not explain today.

Most of Parliament's data is hosted on the parliamentary precinct campus, and the addition of the data centre we established in 2023–2024 has enabled us to respond to a variety of security risks to ensure the continuity of Parliament's operations.

I can confirm that we advocate for hosting data in centres located in Canada and that we strive to provide the highest possible level of resilience, regardless of the circumstances.

Christine Normandin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I will save my second questions for the next speaking round.

[*English*]

The Chair: All right.

We'll now go to Mr. Van Popta for five minutes, please.

Tako Van Popta (Langley Township—Fraser Heights, CPC): Thank you, Chair, and thank you to all the witnesses for being here.

I'm not sure who this question goes to. It's just to the table.

As part of your budgeting and assessment processes, have you had an opportunity to measure the incremental cost of hybrid parliamentary operations? I'm looking at a report from the parliamentary budget office from five years ago. It's completely out of date now. This was when we were in the heart of a pandemic and a hybrid Parliament was created so that Parliament could keep on functioning.

There was a recurring operational cost, according to that report, of \$4.6 million. That included the Senate. I understand that the Senate doesn't have hybrid sittings now, but there were substantial savings, primarily credited to members of Parliament and senators not travelling and just staying at home. The net savings were \$6 million.

As I said, that's completely out of date now. My question is whether we track the cost of hybrid Parliament now that we could probably function without it.

I'm not sure who that goes to.

Eric Janse: Maybe I'll start, and then I'll hand it off to my colleague Stéphan.

For sure, there is a cost to continuing with a hybrid Parliament. Whether one person uses it or multiple people use it, basically the same cost is involved.

We can provide some numbers without telling tales out of school. It was recently looked at by the subcommittee of the board that is looking at our strategic internal assessment of operations to see whether there could be any efficiencies found if hybrid were done differently.

I'll turn it over to Stéphan.

Stéphan Aubé (Chief Executive Administrator, House of Commons): For 2026-27, we're projecting the cost to be around \$7.4 million for hybrid proceedings. That's the incremental cost to our budget for offering the service.

It started in the range of \$5 million in 2023, as you identified. We're now up to \$7.4 million, based on a decision of the board to make sure that we can support an increase in committee meetings over pre-pandemic committee meetings. That's why it went to that level.

We continuously make an effort to review and assess whether there are opportunities, as the clerk mentioned. We've been going through review exercises, and that's one of the services we were asked to review. We are in the process of discussing whether there are potential opportunities for efficiencies.

• (1135)

Tako Van Popta: Is anybody assessing how many members of Parliament actually make use of hybrid Parliament? I know it's sometimes used at the close of the 10-minute electronic voting, and the Speaker knows this. He always asks anybody who had any trouble to please raise their hand. Every once in a while, somebody online says that they had trouble. It's useful for that, but if that's all hybrid Parliament is being used for, surely we can find a more efficient and cost-effective way of solving that minor problem.

Eric Janse: There are maybe two components to that.

One is members' utilization. Either in committee or in the chamber, members still have the option of participating virtually. Also, in terms of committees, there are witnesses. Largely, the procedures that are in place to onboard a witness before a committee meeting are the same as those that occur for any members who are participating. A lot of the resources and costs associated with hybrid proceedings are as much for the witnesses as they are for members participating.

I don't know if Stéphan or Ben have anything to add.

Stéphan Aubé: We also use hybrid as a mechanism of resilience for electronic voting.

As you know, in the chamber, if a member has issues with the application, we will use hybrid to ensure we can guarantee that the member is the person who voted, so this service is now also embedded into the process in the chamber.

Tako Van Popta: I understand the difference. In committees, hybrid meetings are probably very effective—certainly for our witnesses, as Ms. Normandin is able to participate with us today—but the option for witnesses to participate online was available even before the pandemic. That's my understanding. Do we really need a whole hybrid infrastructure just for that?

Eric Janse: That's almost a political question for the members of the House to decide. It was decided to continue hybrid.

You're absolutely right that in the past, before the pandemic, witnesses could appear virtually. For the most part, they had to go to specific centres in Canada to do so, whereas now, as long as they have a proper Internet connection and proper equipment, they can participate from pretty well anywhere. In the past, there were limitations in terms of how many committees could hear witnesses virtually, whereas now, any sitting committee can avail itself of that option. All of that takes resources.

Absolutely, if there were a decision to curtail that in some manner, it would have an impact on resources, but again, that's more of a political question.

Tako Van Popta: That's fair enough.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

We'll now go to Ms. Vandenberg for five minutes, please.

Anita Vandenberg (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

On that note, I've just come back from a surgery, and I was able to avail myself of participating in hybrid form, so I think it's very useful.

I have a question. About two years ago, in May 2024, the Sergeant-at-Arms went public and said that there had been an 800% increase in harassment against members of Parliament, both online and physically. At the time, he said that there weren't enough resources to monitor and deal with that. I wonder if you can tell us what has happened in the interim in these two years.

Also, have you done a gender-based analysis-plus on the nature of those threats? Is there gender-disaggregated data on the threats against male and female MPs and those with different identities?

Eric Janse: Maybe I'll start, Ms. Vandenberg, and then hand it off to Paul, who's our deputy sergeant-at-arms. Unfortunately, the Sergeant-at-Arms himself couldn't make it here today.

As mentioned, there was a request made to the Board of Internal Economy a bit earlier this year for a significant increase in resources. Some of that was specifically to address the issues that you just raised.

Paul, you might have some details as to the breakdown and what's being done specifically on that front.

Paul Mellon (Senior Officer, Risk Management and Investigations, Corporate Security Operations, House of Commons): We've had an increase in resources, not just with our open-source intelligence folks but also with our assistant sergeant-at-arms, all of whom are investigators, to manage not just the increase in threatening behaviour but also the increase in nuisance, malicious and misogynistic types of online correspondence.

In that regard, we have a very robust records management system whereby we correlate every incident and file. We can differentiate between different categories as to whether they're misogynistic, etc. We can extract that information if we want.

● (1140)

Anita Vandenberg: It would be interesting for the committee to see that difference, particularly on gender. If it's happening more to female MPs, it would be very interesting to know that.

Paul Mellon: We can get that for you.

Anita Vandenberg: I also noted that two years ago, the Government of Canada provided \$50 million to the Ottawa police specifically for a dedicated presence on the Hill, and we've actually seen that. In the spring economic update this week, there's also an additional extension of \$3 million a year to cover protests and events, because the precinct is here in the city of Ottawa. As a local MP, I'm very interested in how that's going, how that's interacting.

I know that there are already layered and blended security measures between the RCMP, the Ottawa police and the PPS. Could you give us an idea of whether or not the extra \$50 million that was provided is helping?

Mitch Monette: That's an interesting question.

We have been working very closely with the new what they call Ottawa parliamentary district. It's evolved from a very small unit and is building up to a unit that has greater coverage every day.

We work every day...in terms of information sharing. They join us every morning for our general briefings. We exchange radio communications. We have group chats. They are involved in cross-training. They sit at the table with us for our exercises. They are more than just colleagues now. They're very well integrated with us, and we work and share information on a daily and regular basis.

I can tell you that, because of that, the security in and around the precinct campus is better. Between PPS having a more forward-facing approach and working in a very close manner with Ottawa police and the RCMP, we feel that the service is better to parliamentarians, for sure.

The Chair: I'm sorry to interrupt. These are very sensitive microphones. You don't have to get close.

Please continue.

Anita Vandenberg: I have just returned to this committee. I was on it from 2015 to 2017. At that time, it was very new that the RCMP was taking over PPS security. At that time, there was some concern that there was direct reporting from RCMP officers to the head of the RCMP and therefore to the executive branch, the government. There was concern about the independence of the Parliamentary Protective Service. I wonder if you can give a bit of an update on how that's gone in the last 10 years.

The Chair: Do so very quickly.

Mitch Monette: I can assure you that I'm the last man standing in terms of the RCMP.

Of course, in the beginning when PPS was created, the RCMP had a significant role in creating this new unit, creating policies,

doing training and all of that. Over time, the RCMP's footprint has diminished.

From a reporting—

The Chair: I have to cut you off there. I apologize. We will have lots more time for questions.

We'll now turn to Madame Normandin.

Since we're going for an hour and a half, you have five minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

Christine Normandin: Thank you very much.

I, too, would like to continue on the topic of the physical safety of parliamentarians and incidents targeting elected officials. I understand that last year, a report was published in the media mentioning 1,300 incidents against parliamentarians or officials in 2022. There was an increase in 2023, with 2,600 incidents, and we were heading toward 3,500 incidents in 2024.

I would like to hear your opinion on this trend. Do you anticipate a further increase in the number of incidents involving elected officials in the 2025-26 period?

I would also like to know how these statistics are compiled. Who is responsible for receiving the information, compiling it, and updating the statistics? Is there a specific department? Is it the RCMP or the Parliamentary Protective Service that maintains these statistics? I'm curious.

● (1145)

Paul Mellon: Regarding the last part of your question, statistics on threats and cases involving members of Parliament are compiled by the Office of the Sergeant-at-Arms and Institutional Security. We work closely with the RCMP and our security partners, and we maintain a comprehensive record of all cases involving members of Parliament.

So, it is really our office, working with the RCMP, the Parliamentary Protective Service, and all its other partners, that maintains these statistics.

Regarding the first part of your question, because there was a recent election, it appears that the number of threat-related cases has decreased slightly. We've reached a plateau, but it wouldn't take much for it to go back up. The number of incidents is at the same level as in 2024. In 2025, it dropped just a little bit and has remained fairly stable.

Christine Normandin: Thank you very much.

Somewhat related to that, since a number of incidents do happen, I'd like to hear your opinion on whether or not the number of officers responsible for the safety of parliamentarians has increased. There was a reference to overtime in the opening remarks.

Is there a high level of staff turnover in the Parliamentary Protective Service? If so, is it necessary to rely on overtime more than in the past? Could you provide an overview of the situation?

Mitch Monette: That's a fairly complex question, given that our staffing depends heavily on the environment itself.

Clearly, on a day-to-day basis, we have a core workforce. Depending on the threat or risk, we increase our staffing levels. It's done progressively. When the chambers are sitting, we obviously increase the number of staff. In addition, given the required hours, we need to increase our staffing levels. All of this is determined internally.

In terms of our numbers, I would say that, by and large, we are satisfied. It's very difficult to determine the required staffing levels, as the situation fluctuates regularly. When we reach a certain plateau or observe a trend, we can begin to reassess those levels. However, at present, I would say that we are satisfied with our staffing. We are fully able to do our job with the workforce we currently have.

Perhaps Mr. Savard could talk about overtime.

Éric Savard (Chief Financial Officer, Parliamentary Protective Service): Absolutely.

As a result of these main estimates, our overtime budget has increased to \$3.3 million. So this is a component of our budget.

However, historically, the Parliamentary Protective Service has always incurred overtime expenses in excess of \$5.6 million. For the year that has just ended, overtime expenses amounted to \$7 million, which gives you a general sense of the situation. However, in certain years when there was a great deal of disruption, if you will, overtime expenses rose to as much as \$11 million. So these are costs that we have to manage internally.

We do have some flexibility in our budgets, but as a result of these main estimates, we decided to increase our base overtime budget, because it's a regular and ongoing expense. Statutory holidays lead to overtime. There's no getting around that.

For the rest, it really depends on the day-to-day operations, the level of threat and specific events. In years when there were Canada Day activities on the Hill, there were significantly more overtime hours.

Christine Normandin: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you so much.

Mr. Monette, I do understand that you probably spent the first 20 years of your career speaking right into the radio, and we appreciate your service and commitment to public safety.

Mr. Calkins, you have five minutes, please.

• (1150)

Blaine Calkins (Ponoka—Didsbury, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Mr. Monette, if you find the chair disagreeable, feel free to run a 10-28 and a 10-29 on him any time you want and see what happens.

I'm going to ask a couple of questions going back to the cost of hybrid. Could we get some statistics on usage, just for the edification of the committee? This is not me pre-positioning any negative connotations. I was sick two weeks ago, and I actually joined this committee both days at that time because I didn't want to get anybody else sick, but I am fundamentally curious about what the uptake is, because by and large, everybody seems to be back at work. I know it was a different time. I'd like somebody from your crew to get back to us with this.

I want to differentiate this a bit too. I would imagine, Mr. Aubé, that you'd be the person to answer this question. Prior to having Zoom and prior to having the first virtual Parliament and then the hybrid Parliament, committees did have the ability.... There were committee rooms that were equipped to do video conferences and teleconferences. Are we still maintaining that technology, or has that completely been replaced by what we're doing now?

Stéphan Aubé: We did completely replace the infrastructure within the committee rooms. If you remember, pre-pandemic we used to have studios across Canada that we would lease—

Blaine Calkins: I remember it very, very well. It was very primitive. The COVID pandemic basically brought on a massive surge forward in technological capabilities here and in the House. That's why I'm wondering. We've gotten rid of the legacy....

Stéphan Aubé: Yes.

Blaine Calkins: Now every committee room in the House is able to host somebody virtually, and Zoom is the only platform we use. Is that correct?

Stéphan Aubé: It was the platform that was chosen for interpretation requirements at the time. Yes, it is still the platform that we're using, sir.

Blaine Calkins: Okay, but it also created some issues when it came to interpretation. I can't disclose what I used to discuss at the Board of Internal Economy, but can you give us an update on where we are with the ability to have adequate interpretive services for events outside of official House of Commons duties?

We used to be able to request interpreters for special interest caucus meetings. We can't get interpretive services for some of those things. Can we find out a little more about the status of interpretive capabilities?

Eric Janse: Maybe I'll start, and then Stéphan can jump in.

We can come back with more statistics, but you're absolutely right, Mr. Calkins, that unfortunately there are still meetings, events, etc., for which there is not an interpretation capacity, so those requests cannot be fulfilled. It has been the subject of much discussion at the Board of Internal Economy, to the point that at the board's last meeting, the minister responsible for the translation bureau appeared in order to discuss the issue.

It's largely a translation bureau issue in terms of human resources capacity. The House has invested a lot of time and money in the technology to ensure that the systems are safe for our interpreters, but it remains an issue for sure.

Stéphan, do you have something to add?

Stéphan Aubé: Mr. Calkins, we feel that the interpretation systems that are being used, including the remote ones, are very secure. The statistics have demonstrated that the number of incidents we've had since the beginning of the pandemic has completely gone down. Statements are coming back from people that our systems are world-renowned compared to other parliaments that are using approaches similar to ours. We feel very confident from a health and safety perspective.

As you know, in the last years, we've also worked with the Treasury Board and the health and safety board, because there were some incidents. We met all of the requirements that were asked of us to ensure that the health and safety concerns of the interpreters were addressed. We take this very seriously, sir, as an institution.

Blaine Calkins: I appreciate that. Thank you very much.

The plan, then, is to continue, even though it costs a few more million dollars, to upgrade the capacity of being able to do, essentially, a hybrid Parliament, not necessarily for the benefit of MPs but for the benefit of witnesses at committee. Do I understand that correctly?

Eric Janse: There was a decision made that hybrid would continue, despite the pandemic coming to an end, and that it would apply for members in the chamber and in committees as well as for witnesses.

As a result, we, the House administration, had to—

Blaine Calkins: My point, Mr. Janse, is that if we were going to say that hybrid is no longer an option for members and senators, we would still be using the same infrastructure to deliver witnesses to committees, at the very least. Do I understand that correctly? Would that be the proposal the administration would offer?

• (1155)

Stéphan Aubé: That would be the proposal, sir. We could maybe look again at some of the technologies that are being used, but to actually offer that service, we need similar technologies in these facilities.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you so much.

We'll go to Mr. Louis for five minutes, please.

Tim Louis (Kitchener—Conestoga, Lib.): Thank you very much, Chair.

I want to thank the Speaker and all of the witnesses for appearing before our committee today. It's an important opportunity for us to understand how Parliament and its supporting institutions are resourced to help everyone carry out their responsibilities. That includes everyone being supported in their work and the parliamentary precinct remaining safe and accessible to all. I thank you all for your service.

My entire time was going to be spent almost exactly on what Mr. Calkins was talking about. Just in the interest of moving on to my

next topic, did anyone have anything they wanted to add? I wanted to speak of the importance of interpretation.

[*Translation*]

Canada is a country with two official languages.

[*English*]

It's important. Before I heard the last testimony, I wrote down that it's important for us to be able to communicate with each other, but it's also important to keep everyone safe. Also, technology is constantly changing. One of the things we saw when we came back was that there were pop screens, I think they're called, on the desks.

Is there anything else that you wanted to share with us regarding the importance of interpretation, the resources you need or what decisions to make?

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: As I understand it, yes, you're absolutely right. The business of the House must be properly communicated by using interpretive services in both official languages. My understanding, based on the discussions we've had at the Board of Internal Economy and on discussions that included an appearance by the minister responsible for government transformation, is that there isn't a huge surplus of interpreters in the country. This is becoming a major challenge.

In any event, translation and interpretation are a service of Public Works and Government Services Canada. While many frustrations have been expressed by members about the quality of interpretation, it is the responsibility of that government department to ensure that high-quality services are offered when needed. The Board of Internal Economy has been engaging with that department on a constant basis. Mr. Perron deserves a shout-out for being assiduous in tracking that issue.

Tim Louis: Thank you. I learn a few words each day from the interpreters, so I thank them for their service.

Mr. Speaker, in your opening remarks, you mentioned the visitor registration program as something new. There's a constant balance, and Mr. Savard, you mentioned Canada Day on the Hill. Canadians want to participate. We want them to be part of democracy.

There's a balance. We have to maintain strong security measures, and at the same time, we have to ensure that Parliament remains open and accessible to everyone. Can you tell us a bit about the new visitor registration program and how you're helping to balance accessibility with security?

Hon. Francis Scarpaleggia: This has been a bit of a pet peeve for me, actually. As a parliamentarian, I often have large groups of students coming to a building like the Wellington Building for a seminar of sorts. I found that the time required to process these visitors through security was taking far too long, so I brought it up with Mr. Monette and with others. They're implementing a system to help process visitors more quickly.

I believe there are two components. There's hiring more staff, if possible, but there are also systems improvements. As I understand it—and correct me if I'm wrong, because I don't have the full picture on this—as people arrive at, say, the Wellington Building, the security guards can go to a centralized system to see the names on the list, which should save time on the checks they have to do. Is that correct?

• (1200)

Mitch Monette: I'll hand over the question to the Sergeant-at-Arms' office, given that they've been leading the upgraded program on visitor registration.

Paul Mellon: For the visitor registration program, we've identified deficiencies in the current processes. We've worked diligently with the SRP to improve those processes and speed up the flow. We've taken over certain aspects of it. We're there to ensure that we know who is in our buildings at all times without impeding access to the buildings. That's the main goal of what we're doing. That's what we endeavour to do.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

We will now go to Mr. Jackson, please, for five minutes.

Grant Jackson (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Speaker and your team, for being here.

I want to follow up on some of the questions about interpretation in hybrid Parliament. I'm new here, so I was not familiar with the old system that members dealt with prior to the pandemic.

I'm just curious. We see it used often in committee, particularly for witnesses. I come from rural Manitoba, and if I have a witness appearing from there at a committee, it's very difficult and expensive for them to get to Ottawa, so I see the benefit of that.

I'm wondering if there is a method by which we could keep it for committees but not for the chamber. Has there been an investigation into the feasibility around that?

Jeffrey LeBlanc (Deputy Clerk, Procedure, House of Commons): Mr. Jackson, of course the decision will ultimately be left to members as to what they would like to use. There are costs associated with the chamber. That is clear.

The main use of the system in the chamber today is for the voting application. There are very few members who participate virtually in order to give speeches, for example. There are some, but not very many. The main value, I think, is in the event that there's a failure with the voting system. Then members have an opportunity to participate by video conference and have their vote count.

Is there an alternative means to accomplish that? If members wanted to say that there was no longer a desire to have hybrid participation in the chamber, could we come up with an alternative? We probably could, and there would probably be savings associated with that.

Grant Jackson: Thank you for that. I appreciate that very clear answer.

Just to be clear, the voting application itself is not reliant on there being a virtual option for the chamber. It's just the backstop.

Jeffrey LeBlanc: That's correct. If the voting application fails, then the backstop is the video conference.

Grant Jackson: Okay. I appreciate that very much.

Do you have a rough costing of what we might save if the Zoom portion of the hybrid Parliament went away for the chamber only?

Jeffrey LeBlanc: Our calculation is that for the chamber, it's about \$1.2 million.

Grant Jackson: Is that annually?

Jeffrey LeBlanc: Yes.

Grant Jackson: Thank you very much.

Again, help me because I'm new. Is this a decision that's made by the Board of Internal Economy?

Jeffrey LeBlanc: The decision to adopt hybrid proceedings was a decision of the House. There was a motion passed in the House to make the option of video conferencing participation available to members.

Grant Jackson: Then to remove a portion of it would also have to go through a motion of the House, not the board.

Jeffrey LeBlanc: That's correct.

Grant Jackson: Thank you very much.

How much time do I have, Chair?

The Chair: You have two minutes.

Grant Jackson: That's great.

Mr. Monette, when you were here last time, there were some discussions about resources that your team was looking at with regard to drones and the parliamentary precinct. Has there been any further discussion on resources that your team needs to assess and deal with a drone that would potentially be here for illicit purposes, and what has transpired with that discussion since you were here last?

Mitch Monette: The drone program is a sensitive topic, but I can tell you that we've evolved in terms of developing our program from discussions with our partners.

The subject matter experts on drones and counter-drones are the RCMP. They have a team and maintain a team. We are now at the point of evaluating and studying how we can work with those partners, all of our partners, on a counter-drone program.

At the NCRSSC, the National Capital Region Strategic Security Council, a council of the chiefs of police and directors of the law enforcement intel committee, which I sit on, we've recently launched a working group to look at how we can better approach this program. We do have some technology now that's in place.

In terms of resources, none are required. We're evaluating and developing that program from within. However, going forward, and as we determine the direction of our program, we may have to come forward for additional resources. For now, things are progressing well.

• (1205)

Grant Jackson: Just to be clear, you're comfortable with where things are in the development of the program.

Mitch Monette: We are, yes.

Grant Jackson: Very good.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

We'll now go to Ms. Fancy, please.

I should have pointed this out. Welcome to Ms. Fancy and Ms. Vandenberg as our new members.

Please go ahead.

Jessica Fancy (South Shore—St. Margarets, Lib.): Thank you very much.

I am a new member of this committee, and I'm also one of the first-year members, similar to what Mr. Jackson was just talking about as a newer member. The only difference is that I'm a female, and one of the first things I saw when I walked in here today was an all-male panel sitting for the House of Commons from within the government and...sitting with the Conservatives, and all of the male staffers here. A couple of my questions are with regard to representation, because it matters. Some of them will be tied into security, and then I have a couple of things at the end.

As a female in my riding, for a couple of weeks I've been in the midst of a stalking case with a gentleman from my riding. I've had to cancel all of my previously advertised public events.

The Sergeant-at-Arms' office has been absolutely wonderful and phenomenal to work with, but currently, when I'm in my constituency, I have to be walked to and from my car by staff. I also have to have a lot of increased security throughout my house and constituency. Because I live in a rural riding, I have three constituency offices, which ups that level of security. It's kind of like, "Where's Jessica today?"

My question specifically is this: Are you seeing any specific trends of women in elected office being targeted? I ask because this is happening only because of my capacity as an elected official. How does it differ from what happens with male MPs?

Paul Mellon: If you're asking if there are specific trends, we will endeavour to do a further analysis of that. We do know that the threatening behaviour towards female MPs is different from the behaviour that targets male members. That is obvious.

The misogynistic behaviour online towards female members is very obvious. However, if it's getting worse, we will make an assessment of that, and I can get back to you on exactly where we're at with that.

The threatening behaviour toward female and male members is markedly different.

Jessica Fancy: I really encourage you to take that on, and to look for a GBA+ analysis. I know my colleague mentioned that earlier, and you said you currently don't have that as one of your key statistical analysis characteristics, I'm assuming. If you guys could do that, it would be very helpful. I say that because we learned in our last election that numerous women from all parties

either didn't run or didn't re-offer to run, so I would really recommend that.

Further on the theme of new members and dealing with harassment in the precinct, in constituencies or in home offices, have there been any changes in the number of complaints or concerns?

Paul Mellon: Can you repeat that question?

Jessica Fancy: In terms of MPs working either here on the Hill or in their constituency in home offices, has there been an increase in the number of harassment complaints, and what are they?

• (1210)

Paul Mellon: There has not been an increase this year. It peaked pretty much in 2024. It plateaued, if you will. There are a consistent number of complaints. If we look at online complaints or online social media, it varies. It's flooded, if you will. However, right now, what we're receiving pretty much plateaued from 2024 to 2025.

Jessica Fancy: Thank you very much, and I look forward to an update on how you're going to analyze the GBA+ portion of that.

Paul Mellon: If I could just clarify, it's not that we don't keep track of it; it's that I don't have it with me right now.

Jessica Fancy: I'd love it if you could provide us with a briefing on that. That would be really good.

We talked a bit about the hybrid model today, and I want to put something on the record about the benefits that hybrid allows. We have MPs on House duty, and I know my colleague said she just got back from a surgery. Allowing us to remain engaged with our jobs instead of having to go off on a specific leave is a benefit.

Also, I am from a rural community. Canada is such a large country, and being able to have a hybrid environment allows people the opportunity to be witnesses, whereas they might not have been able to come to Ottawa to serve on panels. Another benefit is being able to vote on short notice.

As a female, I also want to say that in my talks with security, the Sergeant-at-Arms has been so helpful and supportive if and when things happen, so it's not meant as a slight to what your job is—

The Chair: I have to interrupt you. I'm sorry. We're well over the time.

We'll go to Madame Normandin.

[*Translation*]

You have the floor for three minutes.

Christine Normandin: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Janse, I'd like to quickly come back to the issue of interpreters.

I understand that there is a shortage related to the availability of interpreters. I would like to hear what you have to say about the impact this has beyond the House and committees. I imagine that priority is given to the House and committees, rather than to parliamentary events, informal meetings or missions, for example. Is there additional pressure on other interpretation requests that are not directly related to the work of the House or committees?

Eric Janse: I could start answering, and one of my colleagues could continue.

That's a good question, Ms. Normandin.

Yes, priority is always given to the House, then to committees and then to national caucuses. Sometimes, a regional caucus or a thematic caucus makes a request for interpretation services, but the translation bureau is unable to provide those resources.

Christine Normandin: I would now like to hear you speak to another issue, namely, the origin of the various online threats that members of Parliament may face.

Have the countries from which these threats originate been identified? If so, are there currently certain countries that are responsible for a greater number of attacks against members of Parliament?

Benoit Dicaire: That's another good question from you, Ms. Normandin.

Certainly, some countries are more resourced and more actively engaged when targeting Parliament and parliamentarians. It will come as no surprise that these countries include China, India and Russia. This is all publicly available information; I'm not revealing any national secrets by saying this.

In addition, there are also emerging countries that, unfortunately, I cannot discuss here.

That said, this is very much a constant threat not only to the components and the institution of Parliament, but also directly to parliamentarians. You have seen the emergence of AI and new attack vectors, such as deepfakes, information propaganda, misinformation and disinformation. Many of these vectors are new and evolving, and they need to be taken into account.

Christine Normandin: Mr. Chair, did I have two and a half minutes or five minutes?

[*English*]

The Chair: You had three minutes, but I think there was a follow-up.

• (1215)

[*Translation*]

Paul Mellon: Yes.

Our open-source program on threats against members of Parliament shows that most of the threats originate in Canada. Some of them come from outside the country but, to be honest, I would say that most come from Canadians.

Christine Normandin: Thank you very much.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you so much.

Mr. Cooper, you have five minutes, please.

Michael Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Hybrid proceedings for the chamber cost taxpayers \$1.2 million annually. What is the average daily utilization rate of remote participation by MPs in House of Commons chamber proceedings? By participation, I'm specifically asking about members participating in proceedings via Zoom, not calling in or Zooming in to clarify their vote.

Jeffrey LeBlanc: I don't have the statistics for the chamber. I do have some statistics on committees. I suspect the number is very low, though. As you have observed, there are very few members who participate actively by giving speeches or asking questions online.

Michael Cooper: Could you undertake to provide the numbers for the chamber?

Jeffrey LeBlanc: We'll do our very best to do that, sir, yes.

Michael Cooper: Okay. What about for committees?

Jeffrey LeBlanc: For committees, the statistics that we prepared show that on average, about two-thirds of public committee meetings have some virtual participation. In some cases, when there's only an MP participating virtually, it's about 11%. When there's only a witness, it's about 41%. In about 15% of the meetings, both a member and a witness are participating. Those are for public meetings.

Michael Cooper: For 11% of the time, MPs are participating in committee via Zoom.

Jeffrey LeBlanc: When there's only a member participating virtually, it's about 11%. When both a member and a witness are participating, it is about 15%.

Michael Cooper: Thank you for that.

Changing gears, I understand that the Board of Internal Economy has previously discussed publicly the number of communication staff employed by the House administration. How many communication staff does the House administration currently employ?

Eric Janse: I believe there are currently 33.

Michael Cooper: Does that employment figure include the House administration employees who support the parliamentary press gallery?

Eric Janse: The parliamentary press gallery secretariat is a separate directorate within the House administration.

Michael Cooper: There are House of Commons employees who support the parliamentary press gallery, though.

Eric Janse: That's correct.

Michael Cooper: What is that number?

Eric Janse: I should know this. I think it's about 12, but we can get the exact number to you, Mr. Cooper.

Michael Cooper: Are there any cost recovery mechanisms in place with what amounts to supporting big media outlets?

Eric Janse: As far as I know, no. It's one perspective that we're assisting the media outlets. It's another perspective that we're assisting parliamentarians vis-à-vis their dealings with the media. It's for that reason that the parliamentary press gallery secretariat has been in existence for quite some time.

Michael Cooper: There is no cost recovery mechanism. For the \$1.4 billion to the CBC, for example, it provides no reimbursement to the House of Commons.

Eric Janse: As far as I know, no.

Michael Cooper: Okay.

With respect to translation and interpreters, Mr. Aubé, you indicated that there had been a decrease in the number of incidents in which interpreters are injured. However, would it be fair to say that, since the adoption of a hybrid Parliament, there has been a significant increase in the number of injuries?

Stéphan Aubé: There was an increase since pre-hybrid Parliament, sir.

Michael Cooper: I understand that the increase, at one time, spiked to a ninefold increase.

Stéphan Aubé: I don't have the stats in front of me, sir, but they did increase.

Michael Cooper: Mr. LeBlanc, you seem to be nodding that that was the figure.

Jeffrey LeBlanc: I don't know the exact percentage, but it is fair to say that it did increase.

Michael Cooper: How many injuries, for example, were there in 2019, the year before the option of hybrid Parliament?

Stéphan Aubé: I don't have that number with me. We provided statistics to the board, and we could bring them back.

• (1220)

Michael Cooper: If you could, undertake to do so.

Mr. Aubé, you indicated that the number had been declining. Are you able to elaborate on what the statistics for occupational incidents look like?

Stéphan Aubé: I wouldn't want to comment, sir, until.... I will provide you with the right number. We did provide that information to the board, and we would like to provide you with the same information.

The Chair: Your five minutes are up, almost exactly. I might have taken a second from you, which I will give you in the future.

To be fair, everyone else has gone above. You're the only one I've taken time from. I do apologize.

I will go to Madame Kayabaga for five minutes, and that will be the end of questioning. I'll then suspend the committee for a couple of minutes, as we have a couple of items to vote on. Then we'll adjourn.

Madame Kayabaga, go ahead for five minutes.

Hon. Arielle Kayabaga (London West, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

In terms of the House of Commons staying ready, obviously the hybrid model was set up because of the COVID pandemic. If we were to scale it back, what would be the cost of reinstating the hybrid model in case there was an emergency, whether it was a pandemic or any other situation?

Could you also mention the cost of setting it up at first? What challenges did you have, and what lessons did you learn from that?

Jeffrey LeBlanc: In terms of the cost of setting it up, there were a few different costs involved. There was a technological cost from the technology we use and the infrastructure we had to build to support it. A large portion of the cost is from the staff who support the different meetings, both of the House and of the committees.

I can give you the exact numbers, which I don't have with me.

Hon. Arielle Kayabaga: How many staff are there?

Jeffrey LeBlanc: Gosh. I can give you the number later.

Hon. Arielle Kayabaga: That would be great.

You'd have to let them go basically. Is that right?

Jeffrey LeBlanc: If it were the desire of the House to do away with hybrid proceedings, the question we would still have is, how do witnesses participate? Would we continue to offer that service for witnesses?

I don't know that we can go back to the system that was in place before the pandemic, where we brought people to studios. I don't think that business model exists anymore. On some level, I suspect we would have to continue to offer some sort of video conferencing service for committees.

Stéphan Aubé: If I could add to the statement, one of the benefits we've had is that the same infrastructure is also used for televising the proceedings. All committees are now being televised, versus pre-pandemic, when we had audio-only committees. Through the video infrastructure that is in place for every committee, we now have the ability to deliver video for all committees.

Hon. Arielle Kayabaga: Would you say that this is a good system to use and you intend to...? Maybe I should rephrase the question. Once we move to Centre Block, what visual systems do we plan to have in place so we are able to have what we do in the House of Commons—especially in committees—accessible to our communities?

Stéphan Aubé: Benoit can supplement this.

We have a large program that's continuously reviewing the technologies being used within committees. To make a statement of which technologies we'll be using seven years from now.... It's too far away from a time frame perspective, but we are reassessing this continuously.

The CIO of the organization is continuously reassessing. We're working with parliaments across the world to assess what they're using. We know what the requirements are. We're focusing on the requirements. If the requirement is to televise the committee rooms, then we'll make sure the infrastructure is there in order to offer that service. We're not focused on the specific technologies at this point.

Hon. Arielle Kayabaga: That's fair.

To go back to my original question, let me hear what lessons you think you've learned from the hybrid model.

Stéphan Aubé: I was there during the pandemic. We were working on a very tight schedule to bring back Parliament. You need to have the appropriate time to preplan the introduction of these services so you can ensure that the health and safety of individuals is taken care of and that you can meet parliamentary requirements in order to achieve and sustain parliamentary operations.

Lastly, whatever you build in this organization, as soon as you start publicizing it, you need to have an infrastructure that's redundant and resilient in order to ensure that these proceedings can continue working. It requires a lot of preplanning, a lot of testing, the engagement of this organization and the resources to actually do the service.

• (1225)

Hon. Arielle Kayabaga: Obviously, if the infrastructure you've put in place for the hybrid model were to be taken back, including interpretation and being able to communicate in a language that everyone can understand—their own language and the official languages of Canada.... If we were to scale that back, what would it look like?

Stéphan Aubé: As I said, we would need to change how committees are operating right now. It's a service that's given to Canadians. That's the biggest point we would have to look at. You wouldn't be televising committees. We would have to go back to audio committees. Pre-pandemic, we were scheduling witnesses in specific committees so they could appear. We wouldn't be able to offer the on-demand service we're offering right now.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

We'll suspend for a minute to dismiss the witnesses.

• (1225)

(Pause)

• (1230)

The Chair: Welcome back, everyone.

There is a suggestion that we group all four of the votes on the estimates. Is that the case?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Vote 1—Program expenditures.....\$467,147,265

(Vote 1 agreed to on division)

LEADERS' DEBATES COMMISSION

Vote 1—Program expenditures.....\$3,422,808

(Vote 1 agreed to on division)

OFFICE OF THE CHIEF ELECTORAL OFFICER

Vote 1—Program expenditures.....\$65,189,821

(Vote 1 agreed to on division)

PARLIAMENTARY PROTECTIVE SERVICE

Vote 1—Program expenditures.....\$106,149,851

(Vote 1 agreed to on division)

The Chair: Okay. They're carried on division.

Madame Kayabaga.

Hon. Arielle Kayabaga: Chair, I'd like to seek unanimous consent to put a motion on the table.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Hon. Arielle Kayabaga: I'll read in the motion. I think a friendly amendment will come from our colleagues, but for now the motion reads:

That for the consideration of Bill C-25, an act to amend the Canada Elections Act and to enact an act to change the names of certain electoral districts, 2026, the committee hold three meetings: Tuesday, May 5, with the minister and officials; and Thursday, May 7, and Tuesday, May 26, with witnesses. That the committee conduct clause-by-clause consideration of the bill on Thursday, May 28. That the deadline for witness submission be Friday, May 1, at noon and that the deadline for submitting amendments be Monday, May 25, at noon.

My understanding is that the friendly amendment from my colleague will be to replace the word "conduct" with "begin".

Michael Cooper: Yes.

The Chair: That's excellent.

Is there consent for this motion?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Seeing no further business, this committee is adjourned.

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